

Moyers pooh-poohs Snyder's big 'scoop'



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TELEVISION

Bill Moyers has a succinct opinion of Channel 5 reporter Mike Snyder's *JFK: The Final Chapter* series, in which he was portrayed unflatteringly.

"It's scurrilous journalism to put a piece together without talking to the principal," he said in a recent telephone interview from New York. "They never talked to me, never tried to reach me. That kind of, quote, 'reporting,' is to journalism what dog-doo-doo is to the sidewalk."

Mr. Snyder disagrees.

"We made multiple attempts to reach him. And I said we would go anywhere anytime," Mr. Snyder says. "And they (associates of Mr. Moyers at WNET-TV in New York) told me that his schedule was as tight to the minute as could be. And they could not spare me any time at all until after maybe June. So I never got to speak to Bill personally."

As detailed in Tuesday's paper, both Mr. Snyder's reports and Channel 5's on-air promotions inaccurately credited him with exclusively uncovering documents that implicated federal officials in a conspiracy to finger Lee Harvey Oswald as the lone assassin of John F. Kennedy. The documents in question — a memo from former deputy attorney general Nicholas
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Katzenbach and a transcript from a Warren Commission meeting — have been printed in several other books, including last year's *Act of Treason* by Austin author Mark North.

Mr. Snyder and Channel 5 news director David Overton have said that they were "totally unaware" of *Act of Treason*.

"There's no way we would have passed it off as being exclusive if we had known otherwise," Mr. Overton says.

But Channel 5 has continued to run a promotion that says in part, "There's only one. In February, one journalist broke stories that blew the lid off the JFK investigation." Accompanying video shows Mr. Snyder in action.

Mr. Moyers, formerly President Lyndon Johnson's press secretary, was portrayed as a conspirator in Part One of Mr. Snyder's series, which aired Feb. 24 during a ratings "sweeps" period.

In a brief "sound bite" taken from the Arts & Entertainment cable network's *Class of the 20th Century* series, Mr. Moyers was shown saying, "The new president (Mr. Johnson) was on Air Force One. So I took a piece of paper and wrote, 'Mr. President, I'm here if you need me. Bill Moyers.'"

Mr. Snyder, standing in front of the White House, then told viewers, "And he *did* need Moyers. Here at the White House, just three days after the assassination, the man who would become the president's press secretary and one of this nation's most celebrated journalists was asked to tell a story. A story out-

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lined in this secret memo sent to the White House. A story that would try, convict and sentence Lee Harvey Oswald as the lone assassin long before the official investigation ever began."

Mr. Snyder showed viewers portions of the two-page memo, including this allegedly damning directive from Mr. Katzenbach: "It is important that all of the facts surrounding President Kennedy's assassination be made public in a way that will satisfy people in the United States and abroad that Oswald was the assassin, that he did not have confederates who are still at large and that the evidence was such that he would have been convicted at trial."

Mr. Moyers says of this portion of Mr. Snyder's report: "Sensational television is not the journalism America needs. This isn't reporting. It's pulling from files and making it fit what you want it to say, whether or not that's what was meant."

Mr. Snyder says he would have "loved to have heard his (Mr. Moyers') explanation of the Katzenbach memo. I'm not afraid to sit there and interview anybody. But for him to then make a scurrilous comment . . . I would say that at least over the years he's *learned* to be a good journalist. Because back then, out of integrity, he should have resigned."

Mr. Snyder's reports made no mention of any effort to contact Mr. Moyers. It would have been simple to do so. As for Mr. Katzenbach, "we had NBC trying to track him down," Mr. Snyder says. "We were told that he said what he had to say to the House assassination committee, and

that was enough."

But Mr. Snyder's report made no mention of what Mr. Katzenbach had to say to the committee. Nor of any attempts to obtain a comment from him.

In Mr. Snyder's defense, Mr. Moyers has been reluctant to talk about his role in the Johnson administration. He declined to be interviewed for Channel 13's LBJ documentary series, telecast last year. He says he is strongly considering writing a book about that period of his life. Oliver Stone's JFK movie (a cinematically impressive "fraud," says Mr. Moyers) and "doo-doo" such as *JFK: The Final Chapter* have given him even more impetus to write such a book, he says.

This should be said, too.

Channel 5's Mr. Overton, although noting there are "trillions of pieces of information" about the Kennedy assassination, nevertheless allowed sweeping on-air claims to be made about Mr. Snyder's reporting. "Blow the lid off," "for the first time prove," and "for the first time anywhere" — to mention a few.

Mr. Snyder, when told of *Act of Treason* and other books, said, "There are so many of those books, I didn't go back and research."

Instead, he solely relied on information and documents given to him by longtime assassination investigator Harold Weisberg, whose first book, *Whitewash: The Report on the Warren Report*, was published in 1965.

"I spent a long, long time with Weisberg," Mr. Snyder says. "He was the guy who pried them (the

documents) out to begin with. I didn't have cause to not believe him."

Mr. Snyder, who will become co-anchor of Channel 5's 6 and 10 p.m. newscasts Monday, is by no means alone in his zeal to make a name for himself by claiming to have uncovered earth-shaking new information on the Kennedy assassination.

Channel 4's Richard Ray was appreciably more restrained — but no less exploitative — in his February reports on allegedly doctored photographs and suspicious "bums" seen outside the Texas School Book Depository building.

A Current Affair also hauled in a tour in its Kennedy "expose." The even slimier *Hard Copy* claimed its own "exclusive" report on the assassination. *Geraldo*, *The Montel Williams Show* and *The Maury Povich Show* devoted hours to various assassination "experts" and witnesses.

All of this reduces a slain president to the equivalent of an Elvis sighting or another sordid "true story" about how Marilyn Monroe really died. And, of course, it's only going to get worse. Next month brings *The JFK Conspiracy*, a syndicated "live event special" hosted by James Earl Jones.

The two-hour program (April 15 on Channel 21) "will, for the first time" — sound familiar? — "tie together existing evidence and new testimony into a cohesive explanation of the events and people surrounding Kennedy's death."

It obviously has the potential to make even *JFK: The Final Chapter* look good.